



## Dealing with your Teen's Moodiness



**You've noticed that your teen has become increasingly moody lately, often snapping at siblings and spending long periods of time in his bedroom.** He also refuses to participate in family activities, which is unusual for him. Should you be concerned?

Moodiness affects all of us, but can occur even more frequently with teenagers. It is normal for teenagers' moods to change quickly and often. Your teenager may have strong reactions to your rules and expectations, or his or her mood may shift before a high-pressure situation, like a sports event or a test. These changes are normal – they're not bipolar disorder!

### Signs of Moodiness

Watch how your teen bounces back from low or angry moods. If he or she is occasionally moody but continues with usual routines, then there is less cause for worry. But if your teenager's moodiness becomes more frequent or ongoing, or if you notice behavior that is out of the ordinary, there may be reasons for concern. Watch out for behaviors like:

- Excessive irritability, anger or crying
- Isolation from family and peers for extended periods of time

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- Changes in hygiene habits, like not showering or brushing teeth
- A drop in grades (or attendance) at school
- Significant changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Refusal to attend school or participate in extracurricular activities

## What You Can Do

If you notice any of these things happening, consider speaking with your teen's friends and teachers to see if they notice the same changes you do. Talking with your teen is another way to understand what may be happening. To do this, consider:

- **Setting up “traditions.”** Try to find consistent times to do something you both enjoy, like making breakfast on Saturday mornings or eating out on Friday evenings. Spending time together creates opportunities for you to hear about your teen's life and get a sense for how he or she is feeling. Prioritizing these activities and scheduling them in advance will help you both stick to the plan. People thrive on predictability, and – though your teen may not show it – he or she may appreciate the chance to check in with you on a regular basis.
- **Keeping conversations light.** Don't worry about having serious conversations every time you and your teen are together. Keeping conversations positive and short will help your teen remember that it's easy to talk to you, and that will encourage him or her to start more serious conversations later. It's completely okay if your teen doesn't talk much; sitting in silence doesn't mean something is wrong! You may feel pressure to fill silences with questions, but be careful; too many questions can make your teen feel frustrated and less likely to open up.
- **Refraining from making judgments.** It's natural to want to make judgments; we are constantly deciding what we like and what we don't like. You will have opinions about what your teen



tells you, and that's okay. But always sharing your thoughts with your teen may not have the effect you intend. Your teen may have a strong emotional reaction to what you say, and that could decrease the likelihood that he or she will want to share similar things in the future. One way to keep your judgments in check is to notice when you have them. Listening with curiosity, keeping track of your own emotions and thinking before you speak will increase the chances that you'll say what you mean to your teen.

If your teen's moodiness persists, or if he or she refuses to talk to you, you may want to schedule a visit with a school counselor or seek other professional help.

➔ **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.